



DEMOCRATIC POLICY COMMITTEE FACT SHEET

FS-11-General Government

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Earth Day 1999: A Commitment to Building More Livable Communities

As our cities have expanded into suburbs and outlying areas, the problems associated with sprawl have intensified. Across the United States, Americans increasingly are frustrated by unchecked sprawl that consumes space in their communities and causes serious traffic congestion.

Traffic congestion is estimated to have cost U.S. drivers 4.6 billion extra hours on the road and 6.7 billion gallons of wasted fuel in 1996. The estimated cost for the time and fuel spent sitting in traffic jams was \$74 billion (*Texas Transportation Institute*).

Americans' desire to stop sprawl, better manage growth, and build more livable communities was highlighted by the November 1998 elections. During the recent elections, there were 240 State and local ballot initiatives that sought to limit sprawl and increase funding for land conservation. Voters approved 72 percent of these initiatives and committed \$7.5 billion for State and local conservation efforts over the next decade.

In keeping with their historic commitment to preserving the environment and improving the quality of life for all Americans, Congressional Democrats and the Administration are working on initiatives that will provide communities in urban, suburban and rural areas with new tools and resources to preserve green space, ease traffic congestion, and pursue regional "smart growth" strategies.

The initiative focuses on partnerships with State and local officials for better planning and a better quality of life. Democrats will be focusing on providing State and local officials with the resources they need to achieve smart, sustainable growth. Building more livable communities will require preserving green spaces, easing traffic congestion, restoring a sense of community, and promoting collaboration between communities.

- **Preserve green spaces.** Preserving green spaces will promote clean air and clean water, sustain wildlife, and provide families with places to walk, play and relax.

Democratic Policy Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510-7050

Tom Daschle, Chairman
Byron Dorgan, Co-Chairman

- **Ease traffic congestion.** Improving road planning, strengthening existing transportation systems, and expanding use of alternative transportation will help ease the traffic congestion caused by sprawl.
- **Restore a sense of community.** Local governments can restore and strengthen a sense of community by fostering citizen and private sector involvement in local planning, including decisions on the placement of schools, parks and other public facilities.
- **Promote collaboration.** Through collaboration, neighboring communities can develop regional growth strategies and promote the quality of life region-wide.

Better America Bonds will help build more livable communities. To help communities better protect their land and water resources, Democrats have designed a new initiative, the Better America Bonds. These bonds would give local communities the tools they need to curb water pollution, preserve green spaces for future generations, restore urban parks, and clean up abandoned industrial sites.

This program will allow State and local governments to issue zero interest bonds to lenders who could claim a tax credit for the life of the bond in lieu of interest. The allocation of the Better America Bonds would be made through open competition. The variety of projects that would be eligible for assistance including those that address open spaces, clean water and Brownfields redevelopment.

- **Open space.** Better America Bonds would enable State and local governments to acquire and conserve open space to create parks or to preserve farmland and wetlands.
- **Clean water.** Clean water and safe drinking water are essential to environmental quality and the economic future of our communities. Better America Bonds could be used by State and local governments to support projects that control polluted runoff, finance water reduction measures, and acquire and restore wetlands.
- **Brownfields redevelopment.** Pressure to develop open space may be eased significantly by preparing abandoned industrial sites for new development. Better America Bonds would support the assessment and cleanup of abandoned Brownfields sites owned by State and local governments.

Initiatives will lead to a better quality of life. Congressional Democrats are committed to working with their Republican colleagues and Administration to develop and promote initiatives that help State and local governments plan more livable communities by protecting the environment, easing traffic congestion, and pursuing “smart growth” strategies. These initiatives would ensure that a new generation of Americans reside in livable and prosperous communities.